

# Twin Party Shell Game: Bush Trumps Look Alike Kerry

*by Jeff Mackler, National Secretary of Socialist Action*



Were the 2004 presidential elections rigged? Absolutely! But rigged against whom? Against the billionaire capitalist Democrat John Kerry, who all agree lost the popular vote by 3.5 million votes, or against the American people?

I think the latter were the victims. The machinations against Kerry, in Ohio and elsewhere, are the coin of the realm in capitalist elections. They are inherent in the system of minority capitalist rule.

In 1960 John F. Kennedy's clan in Illinois and West Virginia orchestrated the ballot fraud making Kennedy president. Kennedy's boys stole the vote with the help of the big city Richard Daley machine in Chicago while Nixon's agents stuffed the ballot boxes in other parts of the state.

Kennedy's major biographers, including Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Seymour Hersh, record the graphic details. Neither party challenged the results. Both understood that a real challenge would lead serious investigators to every state in the union. Capitalist elections are largely choreographed affair, with adversaries pledged in advance to abide by the result, essentially because neither one's basic interests are threatened.

Kerry conceded and pledged his faithful support to Bush. Bill Clinton was joined on Nov. 22 at the inauguration of his new library in Little Rock, Ark., by George Bush. Clinton declared that both Bush and Kerry were his good friends and that they would work together for the common

good—that is, the common good of the ruling rich.

Democrats, who spent millions keeping unwanted rivals off the ballot, from liberal reformers like Ralph Nader to socialists, are not newcomers to stealing elections. They largely disenfranchised the Black population in the Southern states starting with the violent smashing of Reconstruction in the late 1870s, not to mention decades before. They ruled the South until 1964, when the Republican Barry Goldwater, running on an anti-civil-rights "states rights" platform, won most of those states.

The Republicans' "Southern Strategy" represented a realignment of the two-party capitalist system in the Dixiecrat—that is, racist Democratic Party—South. This was achieved when the bulk of the Democratic Party hierarchy, the heirs of the Southern slavocracy, switched ships for a better deal with the Republicans. In 1972, President Richard Nixon's Republicans swept the entire South, a feat that Reagan and George Bush Sr. repeated in the 1980s.

### **Corporations back both candidates**

It is estimated that President Bush and Senator Kerry spent some \$800 million out of their own pockets to fund their election efforts. This figure excludes the hundreds of millions, or billions, kicked in by corporate America directly (that is, "legally") or by other means.

Several of the biggest corporate contributors, "equal opportunity" employers, so to speak, divided their contributions between Bush and Kerry. Simply put, they backed both sides. In the 1992 election, the majority of corporate contributions went to Bill Clinton as opposed to the Republican, George Bush Sr.

Then there were the additional billions in free airtime kicked in by the corporate-

owned media in the name of "news coverage." These near institutions of the capitalist state are also owned by the super rich who run the country.

The media employ a variety of intellectual specialists, talk-show impresarios, news "analysts" and commentators, editorial writers and dirty trick artists to lend credence to the electoral shell game. They combine to try to convince a wary public that real issues are at stake every four years. But they have not been very successful, as we will demonstrate below.

Finally, there are the two-bit players, the labor lieutenants of capitalism, who pretend to influence American politics by donating union members' dues largely to the anti-labor and boss-run Democratic Party.

Today's labor fakers shill for the Democrats during election time and largely lie down before the bosses and their capitalist political representative the rest of the year. Worse still, when workers do take the class-struggle road and confront the bosses, the AFL-CIO is usually there to blunt their power and sell out their battles, as was the case in the Southern California grocery strike of 70,000 workers in May-June 2004.

The AFL-CIO's well-heeled bureaucrats donated \$35 million to Kerry and Co. while the SEIU coughed up \$45 million in union dues to sit at the feet of the corporate elite for an hour or so—paltry sums when compared to what the ruling rich spent on the affair. In return they got to select one or two officials to speak for one or two minutes, far from television prime time, at the Democratic Party National Convention. Labor's top, John Sweeney, recently pledged to up his federation's tithe at the altar of labor's exploiters, come the next presidential "contest."

In truth, little or nothing is decided in capitalist elections other than which wing or

section of the ruling elite will get the lion's share of booty that comes with control of the government.

A case in point is the recent \$388 billion "funding bill" that caused a stir in mid-November when the Republican leadership sought to slip in a rider that would further restrict access to abortion facilities. The present Hyde Amendment, in place for decades, and supported by Democrats and Republicans alike, drastically reduced access to abortion facilities. As a result, in the United States today, roughly 90 percent of all counties have no such facilities.

The notion that Democrats support abortion rights is a myth. As important as the defense of abortion rights is against the ongoing and bipartisan assault, few bothered to ask where the over one-third of a trillion dollars incorporated in the 16-inch-high text of the funding bill went. These are not the kind of issues that are determined in the election process.

But few would maintain that former President Clinton's historic \$1.3 trillion tax cut, as well as President Bush's \$1.9 trillion in tax cuts, went to anyone but the ruling rich. These measures too are not subject to a decision of the electorate. And neither is the waging of war against innocent people the world over or the squandering of more than a half trillion dollars annually to prop up the falling profit rates of U.S. corporations involved in the production of the world's most modern weapons of mass destruction.

Indeed, the choice we are offered at election time is between virtually identical representatives of the twin parties of capital, whether their candidates be the ignorant and crude sons of ruling-class families or the fortunate few multi-millionaires who marry into multi-billionaire ruling-class families.

### **The red and the blue states**

Our nation is divided, say the media mythmakers, between the red states and the blue, that is, those with a slight majority voting Republican versus those with a slight majority voting Democrat.

The resulting images are generally interpreted by the media and what passes for liberal political opinion in this country as meaning that the U.S. is divided between a thin region of coastal states where Democratic Party rationality prevails, the blue states, and the vast heartland, the rest of the nation, where conservatism is the dominant current.

The fact that Bush's red states, as with Kerry's blue, contain some 45 percent of the eligible voters who declined to participate in the electoral charade is not registered in the red/blue scenario. Nor is the fact that neither candidate received much more than 25-30 percent of those eligible to vote in any state. The so-called liberal-conservative divide was also absent in the election campaigns of Kerry and Bush.

The choice was between historic and massive tax cuts for big-business capitalism, warmongering, attacks on democratic and human rights, McCarthy-like scapegoating in the name of national security, and threats to invade Cuba on the one hand and the same on the other.

Contrary to the red/blue scenario, however, it appears that the views of the American people don't fit the media image. A Nov. 23 New York Times/CBS poll on a number of the major issues before the American people presents another picture. The results are worth noting:

- *A plurality believe that it was a mistake to invade Iraq in the first place. The percentage opposing the war is increasing and today exceeds the percentage that supports it.*

- *A majority disapprove of Bush's handling of foreign affairs, the economy and the war in Iraq.*

- *A majority want abortion to remain legal.*

- *A majority oppose a Constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage, while a majority continue to support either same-sex marriage or legally recognized domestic partnerships for gays and lesbians.*

- *Sixty percent favor higher tax rates for the upper-income brackets, in contrast to Bush's proposal to lower the tax rate for the rich.*

- *A majority has little confidence that Bush would protect Social Security.*

- *When asked to rank their major concerns and given a choice of nine issues, the top vote, 29 percent, went to the economy. Moral values polled 9 percent.*

- *By 48-40 percent, those polled said that President Bush would do more to divide the nation than unite it.*

- *Sixty-six percent affirmed that big business had too much influence over the administration.*

The poll results fly in the face of liberal analysts who see the nation's people moving rapidly to the right. Indeed, the ruling rich, ever more aware of the declining power of American capitalism as compared to its counterparts in Europe, Japan, and China, are moving to the right in order to best defend their corporate interests at home and abroad. But the American people, working-class in their overwhelming majority, understand that their fundamental class interests are under increasing attack, that they have no interest in murdering people anywhere in the world and that the election process itself offers them few real alternatives.

The New York Times poll surveyed almost 900 people randomly selected by a computer from a list of 42,000 randomly selected residential phone numbers across the country. Unlike the several polls taken prior to the election, or the exit polls that were largely limited to registered voters, The Times poll surveyed a broader section of the population, one that obviously included many who were among the 45 percent who declined to vote in 2004.

The Times results bear a closer resemblance to the views of Americans than the corporate-influenced pre-election polls designed to predict election results and the "political views," of working people. The results also fly in the face of the largely demoralized liberal-led antiwar and other social movement leaders who very mistakenly see Bush's election as tantamount to a U.S. mandate for war, if not a turn toward fascism.

### **Social movements collapse**

For the past nine months or so the major antiwar organizations have largely dropped from sight. It would be more accurate to say that the central leaders of the previous mass mobilizations against the U.S. slaughter in Iraq, specifically United for Peace and Justice, campaigned for pro-war John Kerry.

This was despite the fact that Kerry insisted that had he known that there were no weapons of mass destruction and that the Saddam Hussein regime had no connections with Al Qaeda, he still would have not have differed with George Bush's war policy. To be more precise, Kerry stated that he would have pushed for more money than Bush to pursue the war, that he would have sent more troops, and that he would have shared the killing with American imperialism's allies.

UFPJ was joined in its support for Kerry, voiced in the name of "Anybody But Bush!"

(ABB), by virtually the entire spectrum of American liberalism as well as a broad range of those who see themselves as radical, if not "socialist," critics of U.S. policy.

The pressure to conform to the ABB scenario penetrated deep into liberal-left consciousness. David Cobb's Green Party and Cobb himself urged support for Kerry in all contested states. Ralph Nader, who accepted ballot status and support from the reactionary Reform Party, openly expressed his preference for Kerry during the course of his campaign. Instead of endorsing the demand for the immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq, Nader insisted that he was for U.S. withdrawal in six months, following "internationally supervised elections" in Iraq.

Nader's website featured statements of "support" to his campaign from left intellectuals Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn—who made it clear in their endorsement, however, that their support to Nader was limited to "safe states" only. A vote for Kerry was the only choice, they stated, everywhere else.

Nader's entire campaign was predicated on the notion that he could push the Democratic Party to the left—that is, force it to mouth a few more platitudes designed to placate left-oriented voters. In a press release immediately after the election, Nader urged the Democrats to "become as tough an opposition party as the forthcoming Republican efforts to crush them and stand up for peace and justice at home and abroad."

Nader seeks a kinder, gentler, less crude Democratic Party at a time when concessions from any wing of the ruling elite would run directly counter to their material interests. Both wings of American capitalism, in order to remain competitive in the international marketplace, are compelled

to pursue the same offensive against working people and the oppressed as their ruling-class counterparts the world over.

Nader's supporters in the International Socialist Organization (ISO) ignored his "minor flaws" and class transgressions. They even quoted Lenin's pamphlet, "Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder," in their magazine, *International Socialist Review*, to try to demonstrate why socialists should support Nader. Poor Lenin would have been perturbed, to say the least. His pamphlet advocated support for candidates of mass reformist working-class or socialist parties in some circumstances; he never supported capitalist parties or pro-capitalist candidacies of isolated individuals.

The fact that Nader proclaimed his intention to reform capitalism and rejected socialism, while supporting, albeit in a backhanded manner, John Kerry, was apparently a matter of little import to the ISO.

Noam Chomsky's support to Kerry was significant. While he insisted that the election itself was little more than a corporate ritual, he formally advised left political activists to spend little more than a few seconds to register their vote for Kerry while continuing to build the various social movements.

But Chomsky said and did more. He actively engaged in harsh polemics against those who objected to his support to Kerry, accusing them, socialists included, of engaging in empty political rhetoric in the face of a George Bush, who he denounced as "arguably the most reactionary president ever."

"If you live in the real world," said an irritated Chomsky to dismiss his critics, there is no alternative to Kerry. Chomsky argued that however bad the Democrats and Kerry were, "the small differences between the two parties, could affect millions of

people."

In truth, the differences between Bush and Kerry reflected only the minor differences between competing sections of corporate America, neither of which has ever demonstrated an inclination to resolve their declining influence in world markets by improving the living standard of U.S. workers, rhetoric aside.

George Bush's predecessor, Democrat Bill Clinton, bombed Iraq almost daily while enforcing U.S. imperialism's no-fly zones in Iraq or otherwise destroying the nation's infrastructure. Clinton inflicted a merciless blockade on Iraq that took the lives of an estimated two million civilians. He cut more U.S. social services than the combined cuts of the three previous Republican administrations. But in the minds of America's liberals and far too many of those who consider themselves radical critics of corporate capitalist America, the Kerry campaign was the only alternative.

In 2004 we witnessed the "lesser evil" argument taken to its most extreme form, with virtually all of the 700 organizations claimed as affiliates of the United for Peace and Justice coalition joining to support a pro-war candidate.

The lemming-like charge to Kerry exceeded in its intensity the 1964 liberal/left capitulation to Lyndon Johnson's presidential campaign against Republican conservative Barry Goldwater. Johnson insisted at that time that he "would never send U.S. boys to die in Vietnam." But he did it, of course, and 58,000 American youth died there, not to mention the four million Vietnamese who were slaughtered while their country was laid to ruin.

Unlike Johnson, however, Kerry stated that he not only supports Bush's war in Iraq, which has already taken the lives of 100,000 Iraqis, but he would up Bush's general war

effort by sending an additional 40,000 U.S. troops to fight abroad.

### **Is fascism near?**

Some "leftists" justified their support for Kerry on the grounds that George Bush and Co. represented a move to impose the modern-day incarnation of Hitler's fascist regime.

Raising the "fascist" threat has long been one of the chief weapons wielded by left Democrats, Stalinists, and others in the reformist camp who believe that there is a solution to capitalist society's inherent flaws (war, racism, poverty, environmental destruction, sexism and homophobia, etc.) in the framework of the capitalist Democratic Party.

The Democrats, the effective graveyard of social movements, have certainly served capitalism well—often, but not always, seeking to siphon off mounting social discontent and resistance into its safe channels. But there is no real fascist threat today, and even if there were, the Democrats would offer no defense against it.

The capitalist class has resorted to fascism when society became highly polarized, and was marked by a rising and well-organized working class capable of challenging the capitalists for power.

Under these conditions, a severely crisis-ridden capitalism—as in pre-World War II Germany, Italy, and Spain—has few options other than to violently crush all workers' organizations and to install a regime not bound by the formalities of bourgeois democracy.

Towards this purpose, the capitalist class will give its backing to lynch mobs and para-military death-squads (like Hitler's Nazi "storm troopers"), generally made up of disaffected and impoverished middle-

class elements. But U.S. capitalism today has not reached that point of desperation.

For those who believe that working people and their allies among the oppressed are incapable of championing a new world free from the degradation of society by capitalism, and fully capable of meeting any challenge to achieve it—fascism included—the Democrats are indeed the only alternative. But for those who know now or are learning rapidly that neither party of the ruling rich is capable of representing the interests of the mass of humanity, the class-struggle road is the only way forward.

Independent mass action by the majority of the population, organized to defend their own interests against all comers, and acting through their own organizations, has proven

to be the only way to blunt the oppressors' onslaught and win.

It is time to rebuild the wounded—but far from defeated—antiwar movement and all other social and political struggles in which working people seek a better life for themselves and the oppressed everywhere. These are the building blocks of the future challenge to the capitalist system itself.

In time a resurgent workers movement in the United States will also free itself from its retrograde and stifling misleaders and once again take on the bosses at every level. This movement will combine militant activity in the economic arena with the formation of a mass democratic labor party, which will challenge capitalism's parties and pose a real alternative for the vast majority.

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